



THE REBUILD BEYOND PT

A SIMPLE KNEE REBUILD GUIDE
POST TIBIA PLATEAU FRACTURE

IMPORTANT NOTE

This guide is for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always follow the guidance of your physical therapist, physician, or qualified healthcare provider.

If you experience pain, swelling, or symptoms that concern you, pause and seek professional guidance.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for people who have been released from physical therapy after a tibial plateau fracture and are asking:

“What do I do now?”

You don't need perfect workouts or fancy equipment. You need clear guidance, gradual progress, and trust in your body again.

This 4-day program is designed to be followed for at least 8–12 weeks after physical therapy. This is intentionally beginner-friendly and designed to feel manageable – not intense.

About me

I'm **Liz Brown** – a **NASM Certified Personal Trainer, Nutrition Coach**, and someone who had to relearn how to move after a tibial plateau fracture. My recovery has taught me that rebuilding strength isn't about rushing or proving anything – **it's about consistency, confidence, and listening to your body.**

I love cycling, hiking, and being outdoors, and getting back to those activities was a huge motivator throughout my rehab.

This guide reflects both my professional training and lived experience.

Liz Brown

NASM Certified Personal Trainer
NASM Certified Nutrition Coach

GET IN TOUCH

liz@athenafocused.com
www.athenafocused.com



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 LIFE AFTER PHYSICAL THERAPY

Moving forward safely, confidently, and consistently.

2 HOW RECOVERY ACTUALLY WORKS: MIND & BODY

Recovery after a TPF is not just physical – it's neurological too.

3 PAIN, DISCOMFORT & FEAR-BASED PAIN

Understanding different types of pain

4 PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD

Gradually ask your body to do a little more over time.

5 FROM PT TO WARM-UP

Gradually ask your body to do a little more over time.

6 TRAINING LOCATION

There is no better option – only what feels accessible and repeatable.

7 MANAGING SWELLING & REST

Swelling is feedback, not failure.

8 TRAINING PROGRAM STRUCTURE

This structure works at home or in the gym.

13 FIRST GYM VISITS

Your first gym visits are not tests – they're orientations.

14 RECOVERY TOOLS

Movement drives progress. Tools support comfort.

15 A NOTE ON MUSCLE SORENESS (DOMS)

Movement drives progress. Tools support comfort.

16 HEAT & ICE

Movement drives progress. Tools support comfort.

17 FINAL WORD

You got this!!

Life after physical therapy

Finishing physical therapy is a major milestone – and it can also feel unexpectedly confusing.

PT provides structure, supervision, and reassurance. When it ends, many people are left wondering how to continue progressing without overdoing it or losing momentum.

This guide exists to bridge that gap.

It's based on:

- Common rehabilitation principles used by physical therapists and orthopedic teams
- My own experience rebuilding after a tibial plateau fracture

The goal is simple:

***Move forward safely,
confidently,
and consistently.***

Don't be afraid to try, fail, and try again.



Following my surgery, I set a goal to cycle in an event before the year ended. Slowly, but surely, I rode my bike 20 miles at 4.5 months post-op, with a type 5 TPF.

How recovery actually works: *Mind & Body*

Recovery after a TPF is not just physical – it's neurological too.

Even after bones heal and PT ends, your brain and nervous system may still treat your knee as unsafe.

This can show up as:

- Guarding
- Hesitation
- A subtle limp
- Discomfort that doesn't seem to match what you're doing

This does not mean you're weak or behind.

Your nervous system learned to protect your knee. Now it has to relearn that movement is safe again.

This happens through:

- Repetition
- Predictable movement
- Gradual exposure
- Control (not force)



Yoga and meditation are awesome for mobility and active recovery days.

Pain, Discomfort & Fear-Based Pain (*Kinesiophobia*)

Understanding different types of pain helps you move forward with confidence instead of fear.

Normal Discomfort

(OK to Work Through)

- Muscle burn or fatigue
- Tightness or stiffness
- Feeling challenged but still in control
- Mild soreness that improves within 24 hours

Pain to Stop For

- Sharp or stabbing pain
- Catching, locking, or giving-way
- Pain that worsens with each rep
- Swelling that increases during or after
- Pain that lasts more than 24–48 hours

A personal note

One challenge I dealt with during recovery was **kinesiophobia – fear of movement after injury**.

While I had some pain post TPF that was very real, not all of it was coming from my injury. A good amount of it was my nervous system staying in protection mode.

I did not force anything. Instead, I progressively and safely tried new movements, starting small, repeating what felt okay, and letting confidence build over time.

As my strength and trust grew, that fear-based pain faded.

Simple rule:

If movement feels controlled and your knee feels the same or better later, you're good. **If it feels worse later or the next day, scale back.**

Progressive overload



Progressive overload means **gradually asking your body to do a little more over time.**

After a TPF, this should be slow and intentional. **Progress does not mean adding weight every session.**

You can progress by:

- Adding reps before weight
- Adding one set
- Improving control or confidence
- Increasing step height slowly
- Increasing consistency

Sometimes progress looks like:
“That felt smoother than last week.”

That counts.

Gradual, weight-bearing movement helps signal bones to regain strength after injury.

Slow, consistent loading is safer and more effective than pushing too hard.

From PT to warm-up

Some of the exercises you did in physical therapy still matter. They don't have to disappear. **Using familiar PT movements before strength training can help:**

- Reduce stiffness
- Increase blood flow
- Improve control
- Increase confidence
- Prepare your knee for loading

These movements are meant to prime, not fatigue. **If a movement helps you feel more stable or comfortable before lifting, it belongs in your warm-up.**

Continuing PT movements as warm-ups helps bridge the gap between PT and independent training.

Choose 3–5 movements, 1–2 easy sets each. Move slowly and with control.

- Ankle pumps / foot pumps
- Heel slides
- Quad sets
- Straight leg raises
- Standing calf raises
- Glute bridges
- Single-leg balance / tree pose

Many physical therapists use these exercises early in rehab for TPF.

Warm-ups should leave you feeling more prepared, not tired.

If a warm-up feels like a workout, scale it back.

Before rushing ahead

Movements like running, jumping, and leg press are often feared after TPF, but they are not inherently dangerous when introduced gradually and with proper guidance. These exercises are commonly reintroduced in later rehab because they support real-life strength and function.

If a movement feels uncomfortable or uncertain, it's appropriate to modify it or review it with your PT or medical provider before progressing.

Training location

This program can be done:

- **At home** using resistance bands and bodyweight
- **At the gym** using machines and free weights
- **Or a combination of both**

There is no better option – only what feels accessible and repeatable.

Using machines comfortably

You do not need to add weight right away. Most machines already provide resistance through their starting position.

It is completely appropriate to:

- Use machines with no added plates
- Start lighter than you think you need
- Focus on control and range of motion

If form or confidence drops, the weight is too heavy – even if you can move it.

Some days are better than others. If you're unable to perform an exercise, move on, and try again next time. **Don't push yourself past your limits** - it will only slow you down in the long run.

Manage swelling + rest

As workouts and daily movement increase, some swelling is normal.

Swelling is feedback, not failure.

Add more rest when:

- Swelling lingers
- The knee feels heavy or stiff the next day
- You notice guarding or limping

Rest may look like:

- An extra rest day
- A lighter session
- Mobility instead of strength

Recovery supports progress – it doesn't slow it.

Weekly training program

Choose 3 days per week, with an optional 4th day.

- Day 1: Lower Body (Knee-Focused Strength)
- Day 2: Upper Body + Core
- Day 3: Active Recovery & Mobility
- Optional Day 4: Confidence & Light Impact

This structure works at home or in the gym.



Day 1

Lower body (knee-focused strength)

Guidelines

Choose one exercise from each movement pattern below. This gives you 4 total exercises. If you feel good, you may add one optional extra.

- Perform 2–3 rounds of each exercise
- Aim for 8–12 slow, controlled reps
- Work at a pace that feels challenging but controlled

You should finish feeling worked, not wiped out.

Movement Pattern	At Home (Bands / Bodyweight)	At the Gym (Machines / Weights)
Squat Pattern	Sit-to-stand, <u>Box squat</u>	<u>Goblet squat</u> , Smith squat
Quad Support	<u>Wall sits</u> , <u>Step-ups</u>	<u>Leg press</u> (start light)
Hip Hinge	<u>Glute bridges</u> , <u>Banded hinge</u>	<u>RDLs</u> , Hip thrusts
Calves	<u>Standing calf raises</u>	Seated or standing calf machine

Day 2

Upper body + core

Guidelines

Choose one exercise from each movement pattern below. This gives you 4 total exercises. If you feel good, you may add one optional extra.

- Perform 2–3 rounds of each exercise
- Aim for 8–12 slow, controlled reps
- Work at a pace that feels challenging but controlled

You should finish feeling worked, not wiped out.

Movement Pattern	At Home	At the Gym
Pull	<u>Banded rows</u>	Seated cable row
Push	Wall push-ups	Chest press machine
Core	<u>Dead bugs</u> , <u>Bird dogs</u>	<u>Pallof press</u> , <u>Farmer carry</u>
Calves	Standing calf raises	Seated or standing calf machine

Day 3

Active recovery & mobility

This day is about movement that helps you feel better, not harder.

- Choose 1-2 focus areas below
- Spend 10-30 minutes total, depending on how you feel
- Move slowly and comfortably
- Stop if anything causes pain or increased swelling

You should finish feeling looser, calmer, or more comfortable.

Focus	Options
Cardio	Walking, Bike, Stepper
Ankles	Circles, <u>Dorsiflexion rocks</u>
Hips	<u>Hip flexor stretch, 90/90</u>
Soft Tissue	Light foam rolling, gentle stretching

Day 4

Optional: Confidence & light impact

This day is optional and only added after strength feels solid.

- Choose 1-2 options below
- Keep the session short and controlled
- Focus on confidence and quality, not intensity
- Stop if anything feels rushed, sharp, or unstable

You should finish feeling more confident, not fatigued.

Focus	Options
Endurance	Stepper, Stairs (controlled)
Landing	Step-downs to soft landing
Light Impact	Small hops, Heel raises with light bounce, march-in-place

If impact feels intimidating, it's okay to skip this section entirely – strength and walking are enough.

First gym visits

Your first gym visits aren't about performance – they're about getting comfortable.

Keep sessions short. Use familiar movements. Leave feeling confident enough to return.

A reassuring note about the gym

Something that surprised me during my recovery was how supportive people at the gym were.

I showed up in a wheelchair, then a rollator, then crutches, then a cane – and eventually on my own. People noticed and often offered encouragement along the way.

Remember, you're not aiming for perfection.

You're aiming for progress – and progress takes time.



Recovery tools

Optional supports that may help comfort and confidence:

- Resistance bands
- Stretch strap
- Yoga mat
- Light ankle weights
- Knee or calf sleeves as needed, but try not to rely too heavily on them
- Roller ball and/or massage gun (muscle only – never on hardware)
- CBD roller or topical
- TENS unit
- Ice packs
- Heating pad

Movement drives progress. *Tools support comfort.*

*In addition to the tools listed above, I also have some supplements in my **recovery toolbox**. You can check out my blog post to read about [my favorite supplements for knee recovery](#).*



A Note on Muscle Soreness (*DOMS*)

As you rebuild strength, it's normal to feel sore – especially after new or challenging workouts. **This is called DOMS** (Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness).

DOMS:

- Usually shows up the next day or two
- Feels like muscle stiffness or tenderness
- Is common when returning to strength training
- Is not injury pain

Soreness alone doesn't mean you did something wrong.

Gentle Options for Soreness

Foam rolling can help reduce stiffness and improve comfort – but it's not the only option.

If getting on the floor or using a foam roller feels difficult, you can try:

- A handheld roller ball (*my personal favorite!*)
- A massage gun on muscles only (thighs, calves, glutes)
- Apply light pressure while seated or standing

I personally found it easier to use a roller ball on my calves and thighs or massage gun on my thighs and glutes rather than foam rolling on the floor.

Whatever you use, the goal is comfort – not pain.

Heat & ice

- **Ice:** swelling or flare-ups (10–20 minutes, after activity)
- **Heat:** stiffness or tightness (10–15 minutes, before mobility)

Swollen → Ice

Stiff → Heat

Unsure → Move gently

Some gyms have recovery chairs that you can use following workouts.

A simple Google search can help you locate what's available in your area.



Final words

This 4-day program is designed to be followed for at least 8–12 weeks after physical therapy.

Many people benefit from staying with it for several months, especially after a tibial plateau fracture.

There is no rush to change it.

You can keep making progress by improving control, confidence, and consistency – not by constantly switching exercises.

You don't outgrow this program quickly – it grows with you.

You got this!!

You don't need to rush.

You don't need to prove anything.

You rebuild by showing up, progressing slowly, resting when needed, and trusting your body again.

You're right on time.

Thank you for trusting the process - and yourself!

Have questions? Need a bigger challenge?

If you reach a point where you want more challenge or personalized guidance, you're welcome to reach out to me via [email](#) or send me a DM on Instagram: [@lizbrownsays](#).

If you'd like to stay connected

I occasionally share reflections on recovery, strength, and rebuilding confidence after injury.

You're welcome to [join here](#).

FOLLOW FOR
PROGRESS VIDEOS

